

ENHANCING EFL SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE AND INTERCULTURAL INSTRUCTION IN THAILAND

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Abstract

This community service article reports on an International Community Service (International Community Service) program conducted at Chongraksat Wittaya School, Pattani, Thailand. The program addressed students limited English proficiency, low confidence in speaking, and minimal exposure to communicative English learning. Preliminary observations revealed that English instruction was dominated by the use of the mother tongue, resulting in passive classroom interaction and low student motivation. To address these issues, a Fun Learning approach was implemented, focusing on games, interactive activities, and oral practice to create an enjoyable and supportive learning environment. The program also introduced basic Indonesian language and cultural knowledge to promote intercultural understanding. The activities were conducted from July to September 2025, involving Mathayom (Junior and Senior high school) students through 74 teaching sessions. The results indicate improvements in student vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, speaking confidence, and classroom participation. Additionally, students demonstrated increased awareness of Indonesian culture and basic Indonesian expressions. This program shows that Fun Learning is an effective method for enhancing student English communication skills while simultaneously fostering cultural exchange in an international educational setting.

Keywords: English teaching, fun learning, intercultural introduction, speaking skills

INTRODUCTION

English functions as a primary medium for academic mobility, access to global knowledge, and cross-cultural communication (Ghaffour, 2022). Accordingly, English proficiency is increasingly regarded as an essential competence for learners in non-English-speaking countries, as it enables effective communication in global academic and professional contexts and enhances competitiveness in an interconnected world (Suhartina, 2025). Nevertheless, despite its importance, English is still frequently perceived as a difficult subject, particularly when instructional practices place greater emphasis on grammatical explanation and memorization rather than on meaningful and communicative language use (Waham, 2024).

This situation is evident in the educational context of Thailand, where English is taught as a foreign language across all levels of formal education. Although English is a compulsory subject, learning outcomes especially in speaking proficiency remain relatively low when compared with regional and international benchmarks. Haq (2025), indicates that English instruction in Thailand is predominantly teacher-centered and examination-oriented. Such instructional practices limit learners' opportunities to engage in active communication, resulting in students who possess basic grammatical knowledge yet struggle to use English effectively and confidently in authentic communicative contexts.

Similar conditions were observed at Chongraksat Wittaya School, a private Islamic educational institution located in Pattani Province, southern Thailand, which provides education from kindergarten to senior high school. Despite its large student population and relatively adequate educational facilities, English learning outcomes at the Mathayom (secondary school) level remain unsatisfactory. Preliminary observations conducted in July 2025 revealed that a considerable number of students experienced difficulties in acquiring basic English vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction. Classroom interactions were largely dominated by teacher explanations, while students demonstrated limited participation and low confidence in oral communication activities.

Further analysis of classroom practices identified the extensive use of the Thai language by teachers during English instruction as a contributing factor to these challenges. While the strategic use of learners first language may facilitate comprehension, excessive reliance on Thai substantially reduces students' exposure to English input. As a result, opportunities for developing listening and speaking skills through authentic classroom interaction are significantly constrained. This observation is consistent with the findings of Laksanasut, (2024) who reported that Thai secondary school students exposed to interactive and task-based instructional approaches achieved significantly higher speaking proficiency than those taught through traditional instructional methods. The study highlights insufficient communicative practice as a persistent issue in Thai EFL classrooms.

In addition to pedagogical factors, affective variables play a critical role in foreign language acquisition. Learners' motivation, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate are widely acknowledged as influential factors in the development of speaking proficiency. A mixed-methods study conducted by Chaisiri & Chuanon, (2025) revealed that Thai EFL students frequently experience anxiety and low self-confidence when speaking English, primarily due to limited exposure and fear of making linguistic errors. Although the implementation of a growth language mindset framework contributed positively to students' attitudes toward English learning, the authors emphasized that positive attitudes alone are insufficient without sustained communicative practice and a supportive learning environment.

Beyond linguistic and affective challenges, the cultural dimension of language learning has received increasing attention in contemporary EFL research. Language learning is no longer viewed solely as the acquisition of linguistic structures but also as a process of developing an understanding of cultural values, meanings, and communicative norms (Hossain, 2024). In the Southeast Asian context, intercultural competence has become increasingly important due to growing regional cooperation, student mobility, and cross-border interaction within the ASEAN framework (Priananto & Destyara, 2024). Nevertheless, learners in various EFL contexts, including Pattani, continue to demonstrate limited knowledge of neighboring countries' cultures.

Empirical evidence supports the pedagogical value of integrating intercultural content into language instruction. A classroom-based intervention study conducted by Srisudarso et al., (2025) showed that integrating intercultural content into English instruction significantly enhanced students' engagement, speaking fluency, and cultural awareness. Through interactive learning activities grounded in regional cultural contexts, students began to perceive English as a relevant and contextualized medium for intercultural communication rather than merely an academic subject. These findings suggest that the integration of cultural elements can serve as an effective strategy for supporting both linguistic development and intercultural understanding.

In line with these findings, students at Chongraksat Wittaya School were also found to have limited knowledge of the cultures of neighboring countries, including Indonesia. Introducing Indonesian language and cultural elements into English learning activities offers a strategic opportunity to bridge existing linguistic and cultural gaps. As a fellow ASEAN country with geographical, cultural, and historical proximity to southern Thailand, Indonesia provides a relevant and meaningful context for intercultural learning.

Based on these considerations, this International Community Service program was designed to address linguistic and cultural challenges through a student-centered learning approach that emphasizes communicative practice. By integrating interactive English instruction with Indonesian language and cultural elements, the program aims to enhance students' confidence in speaking English while fostering intercultural awareness. This approach aligns with current EFL research trends that highlight the importance of interactive pedagogy and cultural integration as essential components of effective English language education in Southeast Asia.

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Despite the institutional support and adequate facilities available at Chongraksat Wittaya School, several priority problems were identified during the preliminary observation stage of this international community service program. The

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most prominent issue was the low level of students English speaking proficiency at the Mathayom level. Many students demonstrated limited vocabulary knowledge, inaccurate pronunciation, and weak sentence construction, which hindered their ability to communicate orally in English. Classroom interaction was largely teacher-centered, with students assuming passive roles and rarely engaging in spontaneous English communication.

Another critical problem was the limited exposure to spoken English during instructional time. English lessons were frequently delivered in the Thai language, resulting in minimal opportunities for students to develop listening and speaking skills in authentic communicative contexts. This instructional practice reduced student confidence and willingness to communicate, as they were not accustomed to using English as a medium of classroom interaction. In addition, affective factors such as anxiety and fear of making mistakes further constrained student participation in speaking activities.

Beyond linguistic challenges, students exhibited limited awareness of the cultures of neighboring countries, including Indonesia. This lack of intercultural knowledge restricted students' understanding of English as a tool for regional and intercultural communication within Southeast Asia. Consequently, English learning was often perceived merely as an academic requirement rather than a practical means of communication.

To address these priority problems, this international community service program proposed an integrated solution combining communicative English instruction with intercultural learning. The program emphasized student-centered and interactive learning activities designed to increase students' exposure to spoken English and encourage active participation. Fun learning strategies, such as games, role plays, and guided conversations, were employed to create a supportive learning environment that reduced anxiety and enhanced speaking confidence. Additionally, Indonesian language and cultural content was introduced to promote intercultural awareness and to contextualize English learning within the ASEAN framework. Through these combined approaches, the program aimed to improve students English speaking skills while fostering greater cultural understanding.

METHOD

This international community service program was implemented through several systematic stages to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability. The first stage involved a needs analysis conducted through classroom observations and informal discussions with teachers and students at Chongraksat Wittaya School. This stage aimed to identify students linguistic proficiency levels, classroom interaction patterns, and learning needs, particularly in relation to English speaking skills and cultural awareness.

Based on the findings of the needs analysis, the program design stage focused on developing communicative and culture-integrated learning activities. Instructional materials and lesson plans were prepared using fun learning principles, prioritizing speaking practice, vocabulary development, and pronunciation accuracy. Indonesian cultural elements, including basic language expressions, traditional customs, tourism, and cultural performances, were integrated into selected lessons to support intercultural learning.

The implementation stage took place from July to September 2025 and involved regular English teaching sessions for Mathayom-level students. Classes were conducted using interactive techniques such as pair work, group discussions, language games, and guided speaking tasks. Teachers and students were encouraged to use English as the primary medium of communication during classroom activities. In addition, Indonesian language and cultural sessions were delivered flexibly, particularly within the Arab English Program (AEP) classes, to broaden students regional cultural knowledge.

Evaluation was conducted continuously throughout the program through observation of student participation, speaking performance, and confidence levels. Informal assessments and reflective discussions were used to monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. The partner school actively participated by facilitating classroom access, scheduling activities, and supporting the continuity of communicative practices beyond the program period.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this international community service program indicate that an integrated approach combining communicative English instruction, affective support, and intercultural content can effectively address persistent challenges in Thai EFL classrooms. While previous studies have examined these elements independently, the present program provides novel empirical evidence by implementing them simultaneously within a community service framework in a private Islamic secondary school in southern Thailand.

Consistent with prior research, the most immediate impact of the program was observed in students increased speaking confidence and classroom participation. Students who were initially passive and reluctant to speak English gradually became more engaged in oral activities and peer interactions. This finding supports the study by Laksanasut, (2024), which emphasizes the effectiveness of interactive and task-based instruction in enhancing Thai students speaking performance. However, the present program extends Laksanasut's findings by demonstrating that such communicative practices can be successfully implemented not only in formal classroom research settings but also within an international community service program, suggesting broader applicability and sustainability beyond experimental conditions.



Figure 1. English language teaching activities.



Figure 2. Content of word game.

In terms of linguistic development, improvements in vocabulary use and pronunciation accuracy were also observed. These improvements can be attributed to increased exposure to spoken English and repeated practice in meaningful communicative contexts. Unlike grammar-focused instruction, which often limits learners' productive language use to form-based exercises, the communicative activities implemented in this program provided students with opportunities to negotiate meaning and use language functionally in interaction. Consequently, this result reinforces the argument that communicative practice constitutes a prerequisite for the development of both fluency and accuracy, particularly in EFL contexts where classroom interaction serves as the primary source of English input. This finding is consistent with (AL-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019) research, which emphasizes that sustained communicative practice plays a crucial role in fostering learners' linguistic fluency and accuracy in EFL classrooms.

Beyond linguistic outcomes, the program also contributed to a reduction in affective barriers that commonly hinder EFL learners oral performance. Students demonstrated lower levels of anxiety and a greater willingness to communicate as the learning environment became more supportive and student-centered. This finding aligns with Chaisiri & Chuanon, (2025), who identified anxiety and low self-confidence as major obstacles for Thai EFL learners. Nevertheless, the novelty of the present program lies in its demonstration that affective improvement alone is insufficient unless accompanied by structured opportunities for communicative

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practice. By integrating affective support with sustained speaking activities, the program successfully transformed positive learner attitudes into observable communicative behavior.

A further distinctive contribution of this program is the integration of Indonesian language and cultural content as a catalyst for intercultural learning and learner engagement. While previous studies, such as Srisudarso et al., (2025), have shown that intercultural content can enhance speaking fluency and cultural awareness, the present program advances this line of research by situating intercultural learning within a regional ASEAN context that is geographically and culturally relevant to the learners. The incorporation of Indonesian cultural themes enabled students to perceive English as a medium for regional communication rather than merely a distant global language, thereby increasing its relevance and practical value.



Figure 3. Indonesia language teaching activities.



Figure 4. Introducing Indonesian Tourism and Culture in the AEP Class.

Importantly, the simultaneous integration of communicative practice and intercultural content generated synergistic effects on student motivation. Students not only participated more actively in speaking tasks but also demonstrated increased curiosity and engagement with cross-cultural topics. This finding suggests that intercultural integration does not merely supplement language instruction but can function as a central pedagogical strategy to enhance engagement and reduce speaking anxiety. Such synergistic effects have been underexplored in prior EFL research, particularly within community service contexts.

Overall, this international community service program lies in its holistic pedagogical approach, which integrates linguistic competence, affective readiness, and intercultural awareness within an authentic educational setting. Unlike previous studies that focus on isolated instructional variables, this program demonstrates that meaningful improvements in EFL speaking skills are most effectively achieved when communicative pedagogy, emotional support, and culturally relevant content are implemented in a cohesive and context-sensitive manner. These findings contribute to the growing body of EFL research advocating pedagogical models that are not only theoretically sound but also practically applicable in diverse educational contexts across Southeast Asia.

CONCLUSIONS

This international community service program demonstrated that communicative and culture-integrated instruction can effectively enhance EFL students' speaking confidence and intercultural awareness in a Thai secondary school context. By providing increased exposure to spoken English and incorporating Indonesian cultural content, the program addressed key linguistic, affective, and cultural challenges faced by students. The findings suggest that interactive pedagogy and intercultural integration are essential components of effective English language education in Southeast Asia and should be sustained through continuous collaboration between educational institutions and community service initiatives.

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